Central Life Interests and Job Involvement: An Exploratory Study in the Developing World

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between central life interest and job involvement among professionals in two cultures in the developing world, Nigeria and Trinidad. It also examines the impact of sociodemographic factors such as age, marital status, locale of early socialization, size of household, number of children, education and length of service on the above relationship. Data were collected from high school teachers in both Nigeria and Trinidad through a field survey questionnaire. Item analysis, reliability test, descriptive statistics, correlations and subgroup analysis were used for the purposes of data analysis. The instruments revealed satisfactory levels of internal consistency reliability. The results indicated a significant positive relationship between central life interests in work and job involvement in both cultures. However, the subgroup analysis provided clear evidence of cross-cultural differences within the developing world. The findings supported the observation that theoretical constructs such as central life interests and job involvement from the developed world can indeed be useful in studying organizational phenomena in the developing world, provided the measures are culturally sensitive, contextually relevant and carefully operationalized. At the same time the cross-cultural differences evident in this study will warn researchers against treating the developing world as an undifferentiated mass in organizational inquiry.

THE CONCEPT OF central life interest (CLI) occupies a key position in understanding peoples’ attachment to work (Dubin, Hedley & Taveggia, 1976; Taveggia & Ross, 1978; Taveggia & Ziemba, 1978). However, compared to other attachment concepts such as organizational commitment (OC), job involvement (JI), job satisfaction (JS) and mobility motivation (MM), CLI has been relatively unexplored in the theoretical and empirical literature (Maurer, Vredenburgh, & Smith, 1981). Even more lamentable is the near absence of cross-cultural and cross-national studies of CLI. A literature survey revealed only three published studies of a cross-national nature (Clark, 1986; Dubin, Hedley & Taveggia, 1976; England & Misumi, 1987). The Clark (1986) study compared the CLI of Australian workers with a composite measure of CLI.

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among Canadian, Japanese, U.K., and U.S. workers. Dubin et al (1976) compared U.S. workers and British workers while England and Misumi (1987) looked at the CLI of workers from different occupations between U.S. and Japan. These three studies, along with some other unpublished work (Corrie, 1957; Endo, 1970; Kremer, 1962), provide clear evidence of cross-cultural and cross-national differences in the CLI of workers. Therefore, it is important to focus on CLI from a cross-cultural perspective to enhance our understanding of a key variable in organizational behavior (Dubin, Champoux & Porter, 1975; Dubin, Hedley & Taveggia, 1976). CLI is defined as the expressed preference for a particular locale or situation for carrying out an activity (Dubin, 1956). It is also viewed as a reflection of the degree of emotional involvement characterizing the individual in that particular locale or situation (Dubin, 1961).

Research on CLI in the industrialized countries such as Australia, Britain, Canada, Japan and the U.S. indicated substantial variation in work as CLI among different cultural and occupational groups (Clark, 1986; Dubin, 1956; Dubin, Champoux & Porter, 1975; Dubin & Goldman, 1972; Dubin, Hedley & Taveggia, 1976; England & Misumi, 1987; Goldman, 1973; Levine, 1985; Maurer, 1968; Mitchell, Baba & Epps, 1975; Orzack, 1959; Starcevich, 1973; Taveggia & Hedley, 1976). Though CLI is conceptually distinct from other work related attitudes such as OC, JI, JS and MM, it is albeit related to them both theoretically and empirically. CLI was found to be positively related to various aspects of OC for samples of blue collar, clerical and professional employees in the U.S. (Dubin, Champoux, & Porter, 1975; Lounsbury & Hoopes, 1986; Wiener & Gechman, 1977). Lounsbury and Hoopes (1986) and Maurer (1968) reported a positive relationship between CLI and JI for American blue collar, clerical and professional workers while Mitchell, Baba and Epps (1975) found a negative relationship between the two among Canadian autoworkers. CLI was also found to be positively related to various aspects of JS among British and American workers engaged in a variety of occupations (Dubin & Champoux, 1977; Lounsbury & Hoopes, 1986; Starcevich, 1973; Taveggia & Hedley, 1976; Tharenou & Harker, 1982). Goldman (1973) reported that CLI was positively associated with MM among American managers while Taveggia and Ziemba (1978) found them to be unrelated among a multilevel sample in the manufacturing sector also from the U.S. In addition, the relationship of CLI to various job characteristics (Taveggia & Hedley, 1976; Taveggia & Ziemba, 1978; Tharenou & Harker, 1982); personality characteristics (Dubin & Champoux, 1975; Tharenou & Harker, 1982); outcome variables such as job performance (Dubin & Champoux, 1974; Tharenou & Harker, 1982); and turnover intention (Lounsbury & Hoopes, 1986) were also investigated. Though these relationships varied in both size and direction, they clearly corroborate the Dubin, Hedley and Taveggia (1976) observation that CLI is an important factor in understanding people at work.

Empirical work in organizational behavior can be classified into identifica-